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THREE NOTES ON CAPITALS

I

THE church of Santiago de Barbadelo lies about four miles from the railway station of Sarria and at least two miles off the highway. It is, I suppose, inaccessible to carriages, but it lies nobly, with its half-dozen houses, amid grassy pastures and leafy groves, the land dropping away to south and east, so that from that side the tower would draw the eye, as its bells the ear. It is a peculiarly fine example of the Gallegan parish church, larger than most, more rich in sculpture, and very curious in the detail of this. In the twelfth century it lay directly on the Pilgrim Way and figures in the *Itinerary* of Aymery Picaud (*ca.*1130); Villuga omits it from his *Repertorio* of 1547 and names Sarria; it is possible, therefore, that already in the sixteenth century the road was diverted and the church neglected.

The nave is a rectangle, timber-roofed, with two windows on a side, set high and treated like a clerestory; capitals and mouldings are very rich with billet, chevron, and leaf forms; the apse is vaulted in a semidome and preceded by a bay of barrel vault, sustained east and west by columns with strong carving; and the tower, engaged in the northwest corner of the church and filled with a turning stair, opens to it on both faces with bold round arches, well moulded, that rest on similar columns but loftier and more massive. The capitals of these are carved with fantastic monsters—griffin and wyvern, and one, I should judge, an elephant done from hearsay. *Elefas* was an important figure among the mediaeval fauna of churches (figuring, for instance, with his name on an aisle-capital at Aulnay); here the trunk juts out at an unlikely angle. But the Romanesque carving is strong and skillful and indicates the twelfth century. The western porch, timber-roofed and slated, shelters a round-headed doorway with two attached shafts in the jambs (Fig. 1). The tympanum is sculptured to simulate a rising lintel, like that at S. Faith of Conques and S. Maria del Sar at Compostela, filled with a design

of interlaces and rosettes that centre on a human face brutally simplified, like the gingerbread man's—a mere disc with two round holes for eyes and two straight lines for nose and mouth. In spite of the great inequality of the Romanesque carvers' work, their curious inability to render the human form when the design of animal and plant life is quite perfect, I think this case is not one



FIGURE 1.—SANTIAGO DE BARBADELO; WESTERN DOOR

of incapacity but choice on the artist's part, and I should add that I saw a pair of those same faces, only two days before this, on the confines of Leon, freshly carved on the granite jambs of a new house. Their significance I do not know. Above, in the lunette, a sunk circle between two rosettes holds a human figure with wings instead of arms. The capitals in the jambs are:—the outer left-hand, a pair of cocks; the outer right-hand, S. James and two pilgrims, very crudely wrought; the inner left-hand, a pair of lions; the inner right-hand, a pair of cats. The reader can see in Figure 1, that the lions are the familiar Romanesque beasts, and the cats are deliberately distinguished from them in proportion and feature. This work is all granite and though not unspotted by yellow lichen, very sharp, sheltered by the porch from weather. There can be no question of modern tampering, for since the end, at latest, of the fifteenth century, the application of humour to religion has been discouraged in Spain. On a door in the north flank of the church one capital

shows two lions affronté regardant, and the corresponding capital I can only conjecture to be Manichæan; on each of the two faces are two serpents intertwined, one drinking from a chalice and the other eating of the Fruit of the Tree. The two serpents' heads hang above the cup at the centre of the capital.

I cannot find any reference to the church apart from itineraries; Morales overlooked it and Florez ignored it. There, in the twelfth century, a carver had strange imaginations, probably blasphemous, and a thrill of Satanic rapture.

II

At the convent of Las Huelgas, near Burgos, founded in 1187 by Alfonso VIII and Eleanor his English queen, the principal architecture is Angevine, but in the interior not only the plaster decoration of ceilings and the wooden leaves of doors, but the fabric of whole buildings, is Mudejar, testifying to skilled workmen who were Moorish slaves. It is possible that they brought from the South not only their skill, their designs, and their horse-shoe architecture, but finished work as well, for royal gifts perhaps. The custom was common; as early as the ninth century Alfonso III bought marbles and columns for Santiago from the Moors. The chapel of S. James is purely Arab work, very rich, and the horse-shoe arch that opens to it from the garden rests on a pair of capitals that are almost as fine as the antique. Spanish Byzantine of the sixth or seventh century had forms like this, and the fourteenth century work at Seville,¹ which it most resembles, was based on that (Fig. 2). It is neither Romanesque nor Gothic in the least

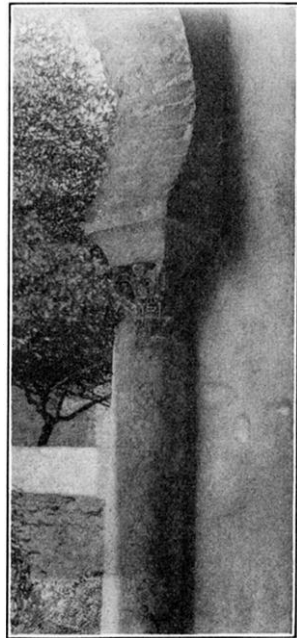


FIGURE 2.—LAS HUELGAS;
ENTRANCE TO CHAPEL OF S.
JAMES

¹ Forms very similar occur, at the Alcazar of Seville, in the "Dormitorio de los Reyes" and the "Patio de las Muñecas." Cf. also the Arab-Byzantine capitals at Cordova, photographed by Laurent, No. 872.

degree, its perfection is in no wise European; its affinity is not with Latin art, but with another tradition most plainly to be traced within the kingdom of Leon or in the lands contiguous thereto.

Roman remains do indeed persist, though hardly. The lofty and noble façade of S. Maria la Madre at Orense enshrines eight antique capitals whose history no man knows; but the survival was easy there, for Orense was a Roman thermal station, and the capitals are true Roman. In S. Cebrian de Mazote, a church discovered in 1902, contemporary and closely allied with S. Miguel de Escalada, some of the capitals are plainly of Roman inspiration, and resemble those of the destroyed Church of S. Roman de Hornija.

At Sahagun, in the kingdom of Leon, was the greatest Benedictine monastery in Spain, founded in 905, reformed in 1079 and made by a French prelate into a mere *succursal* of Cluny. In the ruined abbey church by S. Tirso (of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries), such capitals as remain are of the familiar transitional form of a ball in a claw, or a bud just cracked out of its casing, if you prefer. There are few capitals anywhere in the town, for it is built like Babel, where "they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar." The churches are of the twelfth century and on down to the fourteenth, of a marked regional style. But the town was a halting-place on the Pilgrim Way, and was a great station on the Roman road that went before it, and there stands in S. Lorenzo a pair of capitals made into a holy-water stoup which show in one way a knowledge of some relics of the antique, and in another a connexion with the building that was done elsewhere in Leon in the tenth century. The lineal form that the delicate leaflets take, and their arrangement as individual growths on either side a central form, instead of mere slashes in a solid though crumpled fabric, suggest the East and not the West, suggest a different conception from the Roman acanthus leaf. The base of each capital is bound with a braided twist, and the abacus which was a trapezoidal block at Ravenna and Constantinople, is here moulded in successive stages divided by a fillet. The characteristic beading on this shows well in Figure 3. The same abacus and necking reappear in two, at least, of a group of churches that were built by a single group of men: S. Miguel de Escalada and Santiago de Peñalva in Leon; Villanueva de las Infantas and S. Miguel de Celanova in Galicia south of Orense.

Sahagun was early a frequented shrine. To the *Santos Domnos*, Facundus and Primitivus, kings and bishops gave granges and mills, towns and cornland. Finally it sheltered a handful of Cordovan refugees with their abbot Alfonso.¹ For them Alfonso the Great bought the little church by the river Cea, on the Roman road called Strata or Calciata. It was built perhaps in 874, destroyed in 883 by Abohalid; "to its foundations" says the Chronicle of Albelda. "Sed per castrum Cojan-cam ad Cejani iterum reversi sunt, domumque Sanctorum Facundi et Primitivi usque ad fundamenta diruerunt." In 905 Alfonso promises, in a privilege, that he and his wife Ximena will "restore, enlarge

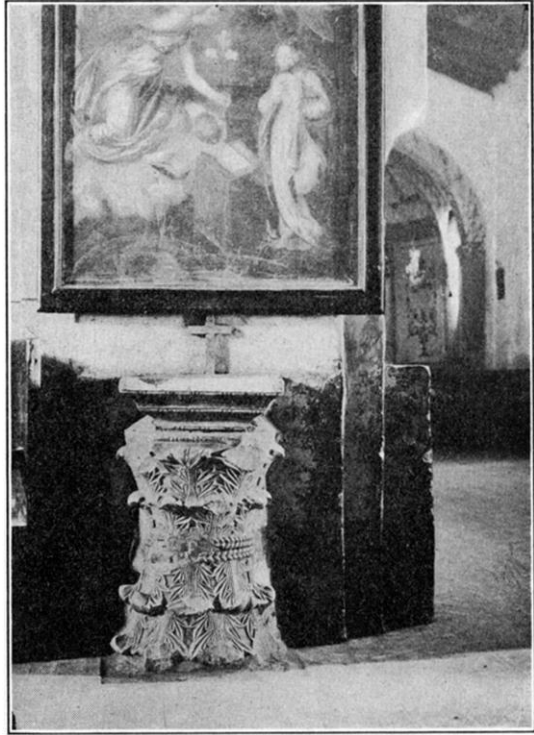


FIGURE 3.—SAHAGUN; S. LORENZO; HOLY WATER STOUP

and dower it." In the tenth century it was rich. Almansor ruined it again: "Domum Sanctorum Facundi et Primitivi subvertit." In the eleventh century it was very rich; Bernard the great archbishop of Toledo was still abbot there when Alfonso VI reformed it (1079), and Gregory VII in 1083 gave it all the prerogatives

¹ "Ambiguum esse non potest," runs a privilege of Ramiro II, "quod plerisque cognitum manet, quoniam dum esset olim illo in loco villa et ecclesia parrochitana motus misericordia avus meus Serenissimus Princeps Adefonso emsit ea à propriis dominis, et dedit eam sub manus abbati Adefonso, qui cum sociis de Spania advenerant huic regioni habitantes ad construendum ibidem Monasterium sanctimoniale, sicuti est usque, et fecit testamentum."

and privileges of Cluny in France. But the church was not fit for use until 1213: "translata sunt de veteri ecclesia ad novam V

idus Junii¹ era MCCLI, regnante Adefonso Rege Castellae, Abbate Guillelmo in isto monasterio praesedente.'" *Sic transit* is the story of Sahagun. Not one complete wall of Abbot William's great church still stands; and of all Abbot Alfonso's, this piece alone survives.

The ancient priory of S. Miguel de Escalada stands on the bank of the Esla, and, P. Fidel Fita says, near a pilgrim route. The Romans had been there, for many of their bricks were built up into the walls, and stones with Visigothic inscriptions as well, when, in a single year, a handful of monks expelled from Cordova with their abbot Alfonso raised the church and consecrated it in 914. It is something more than probable that old work remained, Visigothic

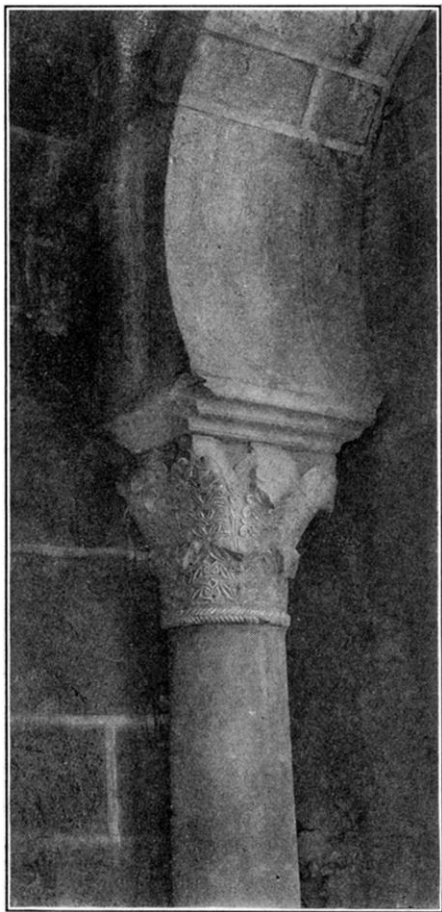


FIGURE 4.—CAPITAL IN CLOISTER OF S. MIGUEL DE ESCALADA

perhaps, and was used again, if the work was done at that rate, and it is also possible that the great cloister down the south side was not included in that consecration by Bishop Genadio of Astorga, but should rather be referred to a tablet built into the door of it, dated 1050, and inscribed with the names of royalty,

¹ It should be January, says Florez.

Ferdinand and Sancha, Ciprian, Bishop of Leon, and the abbot Sabarico. The occasion of that rebuilding or enlargement is unknown. "25 November, 988. Campaign of Almansor this' year, how he destroyed the city of Leon, and the monasteries that were in his path:"—so the ancient chronicle. But that date is too early, and in 1002 Almansor died and the land had peace a while. Certainly the interior contains no capitals like these thirteen of the cloister, all alike; and while the fabric itself, with its horse-shoe arches both structural and on plan, is universally admitted to derive from Cordova, the capital here (Fig. 4) looks like a development, in fanciful and dexterous hands, of the motive found at Sahagun, and supplies an intermediate form between that and the bold and noble capitals at Santiago de Peñalva (Fig. 5).

That lonely hermitage was built about 937, and Bishop Genadio lies there inurned, but the only record of dedication that survives is of 1105; and it may be presumed that a good bit of rebuilding, after a century and a half, brought it about. The capitals, of a marble not found among the neighboring rocks, are all of one design.

Here, then, we have a single style, within the kingdom of Leon,



FIGURE 5.—SANTIAGO DE PEÑALVA; COLUMN OF NAVE

developing before our eyes from the antique within about fifty years—either in the first half of the tenth century or conceivably in the second half of the eleventh. And considering the unity of

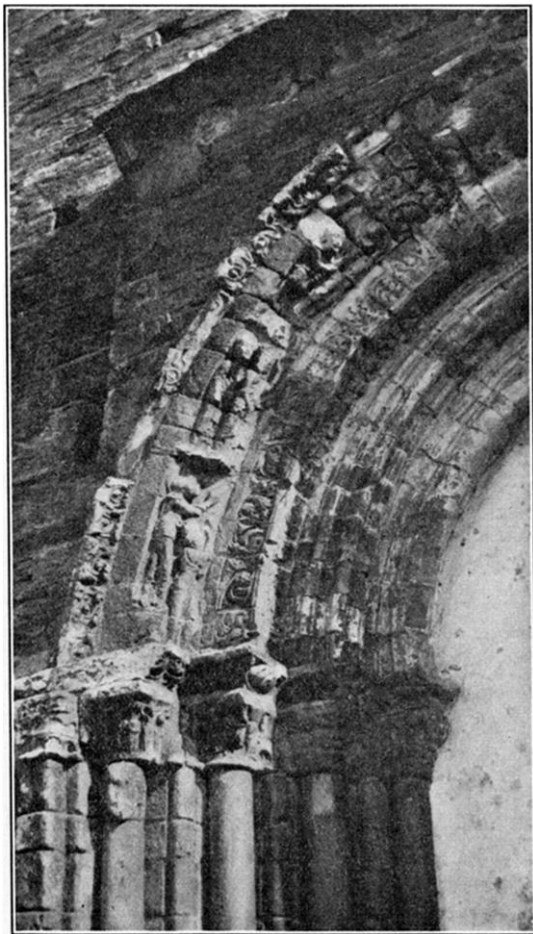


FIGURE 6.—VILLAFRANCA; CHURCH OF SANTIAGO;
PUERTA DEL PERDON

effect in S. Miguel and Santiago, it is hardly possible to lay all this to repairs and restorations; one would have to postulate a more complete rebuilding than the wear-and-tear of a century and a half should demand; or incline to the earlier date.

III

Villafranca del Bierzo was a very important station for pilgrims. The mountains of Leon had been passed by the Port of Fuentebadon; the mountains of Galicia rose already on the horizon, where the col of Cebrero lies well above 3000 feet, snow-bound for a

week at a time in the winter. Founded in 1070, the name of the town tells its history, *Villa Francorum*. The monks of Cluny maintained there two hospices (of which one still survives) and a monastery church. In 1120 it was thriving, and this date, or something near it, may be suggested for the church of Santiago, set high above the stream in a suburb quiet now. The

nave is roofed with wood; the apse has, outside, fine columnar buttresses, and moulded windows with short shafts in the jambs both without and within, their capitals of leaves and once a pair of doves. The west door is of no worth, but on the north side, looking toward the town, that is to say, and now walled up, the pilgrims had a magnificent sculptured *Puerta del Perdón* (Fig. 6). They must have all the credit, for the forms, the disposition, and the iconography, all are French. The archivolt sculptured with saints arranged in pairs overlapping is of the style of Saintonge: it recalls Aulnay, Saintes, and S. Croix of Bordeaux, and is strictly paralleled only at the church of Échellais. By S. Nicholas of Civray the pilgrims had come down, under the charge of S. Martin of Tours and S. Hilary of Poitiers, to Bordeaux and Roncevaux, on their way to S. James in the West. But whereas the figures in the great arch are of the style of Civray and Échellais,¹ and, curiously enough, the capitals of the shafts in the right-hand or western door-jamb are merely in the vigorous Romanesque manner, of monstrous or leafy forms, those on the left or eastern side are borrowed from the painted windows of northern France. The outermost is insignificant; it figures a palace, of Herod or of Pilate; the second carries on its two faces two groups, one of the three Maries, the other of the Crucified between SS. Mary and John, conceived, composed, and placed exactly as in a roundel of the windows at Chartres, Le Mans, or Bourges.² On the third the Three Kings are riding as knights ride in the Charlemagne window at Chartres. The scene in the fourth, of the three in bed together, with the angel above, is a familiar convention of mediaeval France, but again the relief is quaintly treated, as the glass-workers treated such in one compartment of a quatrefoil, and in a different way from the Spanish motive of the Three Kings of Orient. The last presents the Epiphany. Here two men, or parties, paid their debt to the great S. James while earning money for the further journey or working out their board. Not for the monks of Cluny but on a parish and a pilgrim church they left their mark as *Francos*—free-handed, free-spirited, the sign that they were French.

GEORGIANA GODDARD KING.

BRYN MAWR, 1916.

¹Figured in Baum, *Romanesque Architecture in France*, pp. 43 and 55.

² There is no questioning this: I had been studying the great work of Cahier and Martin shortly before seeing them, and the inference was irresistible.